

Viet Cuong's *Bull's-Eye*: A Conductor's Analysis

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Wind Conducting and the Graduate Faculty of the
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Musical Arts.

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Abstract

Of the more than five-hundred works cataloged in Rodney Winther's *An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music*, ninety-six percent include double reed instruments in their orchestration, which limits the repertoire available to ensembles without access to double reed players. To address this lack of accessible repertoire, a consortium of ten institutions and organizations commissioned composer, Viet Cuong (b. 1990), to create a new work for chamber winds. The result of this commission is *Bull's-Eye* (2019), a piece that sits at the intersection of the visual and performing arts. This crossroads of the arts generates opportunities for collaboration between conductors, musicians, and visual artists and the creation of unique performance opportunities that synthesize the two art forms.

This document will present a conductor's analysis of *Bull's-Eye*. The analysis will explore the composer's background, source material, form and structure, and offer rehearsal considerations to assist conductors who program the piece for performance with their ensembles.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Viet Cuong for creating a fantastic new addition to the chamber winds repertoire and for his collaboration in crafting the first performance of the work. To the members of the University of Kansas Wind Ensemble, I thank you for your artistry and care in bringing Viet's new work to life. To my colleagues in the KU conducting studio, Nicholas Waldron, Brett Keating, Bethany Amundson, Tom Davoren, and Jacquelyn Dawson, thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement, and friendship.

I want to thank my committee members, Matthew O. Smith, Sharon Toulouse, Colin Roust, and Martin Bergee for their continued support throughout my time at the University of Kansas.

Dr. Paul W. Popiel, thank you for encouraging me to pursue this degree, supporting the commissioning of this new work, and for your constant support throughout my residency. My family is grateful to you for creating opportunities for me to return home without interfering with my duties at KU.

To my family, thank you for your support throughout this academic pursuit. I am thankful for your prayers, phone calls, and all of the assistance provided behind the scenes to Megan and I over the past two years.

Finally, to my loving wife, Megan, and our two boys, Benjamin and Zachary, thank you for your loving support, patience, and understanding. This was challenging for all of us emotionally and being apart from each other was incredibly stressful. I love each of you with all my heart and I am grateful that we can now start the next chapter of our life journey together.

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Chapter 1: Commission

Bull's-Eye (2019) was commissioned by a consortium of ten universities and organizations: University of Kansas, Mu Lambda Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, University of West Georgia, Fresno Pacific University, University of Manitoba, Valdosta State University, and Carroll University.¹

Conversations, with composer Viet Cuong and Nils Landsberg, the consortium organizer, began in December of 2017 at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, Illinois. Landsberg requested that Cuong create a ten-minute work for a chamber wind ensemble of approximately thirteen players. Cuong had the freedom to select the instrumentation for the ensemble within the following parameters:

1. Piano and percussion should be included in the orchestration.
2. If possible, double reed instruments should not be included in the orchestration.

Of the more than five-hundred works cataloged in Rodney Winther's *An Annotated Guide to Wind Chamber Music*, ninety-six percent include double reed instruments in their orchestration, which limits the repertoire available to ensembles without access to double reed players. The goal of this commission was to create an opportunity for smaller collegiate band programs to perform chamber music of high artistic merit, from an emerging young composer, without having to compromise the timbre of the piece due to instrumentation substitutions.

¹ The Consortium Letter of Agreement is located in Appendix D.

Chapter 2: Viet Cuong

Viet Cuong's music engages both the listener and performer in an exploration of the whimsical and unexpected. In addition to his large catalog of chamber, solo, and orchestral music, Cuong has embraced his own experience in wind bands by composing several works for the medium.² A recipient of the Walter Beeler Memorial Prize for *Sound And Smoke* (2012), Cuong's music for winds is garnering a growing number of performances and recognition.³

Cuong was born in West Hills, California on September 8, 1990. He began his musical studies at age five, when his parents enrolled him in piano lessons after reading about the intellectual impact of the so-called "Mozart effect."⁴ However, this first endeavor into music did not last long. His piano studio was heavily influenced by the Suzuki method, which did not align with Cuong's musical interests. He wanted to play music that excited him. He wanted to play "Disney songs" and he did not enjoy practicing the music that was required of the curriculum.⁵ Cuong left the studio less than a year.

Cuong's family moved to Marietta, Georgia when he was seven years old and he expressed to his mother that he still had an interest in playing the piano. His mother contacted a local music store and Cuong began studying with one of their applied teachers who was "much more relaxed about the repertoire" and allowed him to perform music of his choosing.⁶ When he

² Cuong's catalog of music for Wind Ensemble is outlined in Appendix A.

³ The Walter Beeler Memorial Composition Prize was established in 1975 by the Ithaca College School of Music. Winners are selected by a committee of Ithaca College faculty. The competition was created to further encourage the composition and performance of the highest quality wind band literature.

⁴ The "Mozart effect" was first described by Dr. Alfred Tomatis in his book *Pourquoi Mozart?* which presented research that involved using Mozart's music in attempts to cure various disorders. The term eventually evolved, through the research of Frances Rauscher, Gordon Shaw, and Catherine Ky and the writings of Don Campbell, to be associated with temporarily increasing one's IQ score by listening to Mozart's compositions.

⁵ Mark Connor, "Viet Cuong," *Everything Band*, Podcast audio, Jan. 21, 2019, www.markjconnor.com/eb-podcast.

⁶ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019. The full transcript of the interview is located in Appendix B.

was eight years old, Cuong made his first venture into composition: “I was learning the Pachelbel *Canon*, which I thought was such a beautiful piece, and I remember just playing the left hand and making up melodies over the left hand.”⁷ As a result of this first endeavor in improvisation, Cuong started to learn the functionality of chords and the concepts of consonance and dissonance. Although he still did not enjoy practicing the instrument, Cuong continued to play the piano, improvising melodies and exploring harmonic progressions, and eventually transcribe what he played onto staff paper.

In sixth grade, Cuong enrolled in his middle school’s band program as a percussionist. His piano background allowed him to quickly excel with the keyboard percussion instruments. Prior to entering high school, Cuong was introduced to notation software while attending a recruiting event hosted by the famed Lassiter High School band program.⁸ The Assistant Director of Bands, Catharine Sinon Bushman, presented a session about *Finale NotePad*, the free notation software from *MakeMusic*. Cuong recalls this as a pivotal moment in his musical path: “I remember thinking, ‘Oh, this is what I’ve always needed’ because I have had these ideas that I wanted to write down, but I didn’t have any staff paper.”⁹ Cuong taught himself how to use the software by writing music similar to what he was performing and hearing in band. His role as a middle-school percussionist afforded him the opportunity to learn the orchestration of the ensemble, as his director would isolate voices and combinations of instruments during the rehearsal process.

⁷ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019.

⁸ The Lassiter High School Band, under the leadership of Alfred Watkins from 1982-2013, has received numerous accolades for its excellence in performance including invitations to perform at the Midwest Clinic (1989, 1996), Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade (1988, 2001, 2005, 2013), and the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade (1999, 2004, 2010). The Lassiter High School Marching Band were Bands of America Grand National Champions in 1998 and 2002.

⁹ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019.

In high school, Cuong was a member of the Lassiter High School Band. As a percussionist, Cuong's musical education was influenced by the school's Director and Assistant Director of Percussion Studies, Mike Lynch and Scott Brown.¹⁰ In addition to his percussion studies, Cuong also learned to play the clarinet. Because of his piano background, Cuong was assigned to be a member of the front ensemble during marching band season. During his tenure with the marching band, they were invited to perform in the Rose Bowl Parade and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. These invitations led Cuong to the new instrument: "I remember that the pit would play sleigh bells in the parade and I didn't want to do that. So, my mom bought me a plastic clarinet on eBay, so that I could play clarinet in the parades."¹¹ Learning the clarinet introduced Cuong to musical concepts that a young percussionist might overlook including slurs, tonguing, and the different nuances afforded through articulation, vibrato, and tone colors. Cuong eventually switched to playing clarinet full-time near the end of his high school career.

The Lassiter High School Band directors, Alfred Watkins and Catharine Sinon Bushman, were very supportive of Cuong's interest in composition. They loaned him band scores and the *Teaching Music through Performance in Band* recordings, so he could study and learn from the repertoire featured in the series. After studying the scores and listening to the recordings, Cuong attempted to write music in a similar style, but was limited by *Finale NotePad*'s ten-staff maximum. Cuong eventually received a copy of the full version of *Finale* from his mentor, Bushman, after she won it in a raffle at the Midwest Clinic International Band, Orchestra, and Music Conference in Chicago, IL. Cuong's guided exposure to contemporary band music and its composers led him to a pivotal discovery: one can make a career as a full-time composer. Cuong

¹⁰ Mark Connor, "Viet Cuong," *Everything Band*, Podcast audio, Jan. 21, 2019, www.markjconnor.com/eb-podcast.

¹¹ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019.

decided to pursue composition as a career and in 2008 enrolled in the composition program at the Peabody Conservatory.

At Peabody, Cuong studied composition with Kevin Puts and Oscar Bettison. During the summer of 2011, Cuong composed *Sound And Smoke* at the request of Dr. Harlan Parker, conductor of the Peabody Wind Ensemble. That piece was awarded the Walter Beeler Memorial Prize from Ithaca College in 2012 and it garnered Cuong much attention in the band medium, resulting in commissions for *Moth* (2013) and *Diamond Tide* (2015).¹²

Following his studies at Peabody, Cuong earned a Master of Fine Arts degree at Princeton University as a Naumburg and Roger Sessions Fellow. He studied there with Steve Mackey, Donnacha Dennehy, Dan Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Paul Lansky, and Louis Andriessen. In 2019, Cuong earned an Artist Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music. At Curtis, Cuong studied with Jennifer Higdon, David Ludwig, and Richard Danielpour. Cuong is currently completing a Ph.D. in composition at Princeton. His dissertation will focus on the process of transcribing his chamber concerto for percussion quartet, *Re(new)al* for both symphony orchestra and wind ensemble.

Cuong is a member of the Blue Dot Collective, a group of six composers who “focus on writing adventurous new music for wind band.”¹³ The other composers in this group include David Biedenbender, Jennifer Jolley, Benjamin Taylor, Jess Turner, and Roger Zare.

¹² *Moth* was commissioned by the Brooklyn Wind Symphony. *Diamond Tide* was commissioned by the TMEA Region 18 Middle School Bands.

¹³ www.bluedotcollective.weebly.com

Chapter 3: Compositional Style and Approach

Compositional Style

When asked to define his compositional style, Cuong separated his catalog for wind ensemble into two distinct periods. The first period includes *Sound And Smoke* (2011), *Moth* (2013), and *Diamond Tide* (2015). These works, are characterized by independent lines, layered dynamic contour, non-traditional harmonies, shifting meters, extended techniques, large percussion sections, and an exploitation of the intimate and bombastic nuances unique to the medium. These three works, which Cuong considers his musical voice from his early twenties, continue to influence his compositions today even though he feels that his compositional style has evolved: “There are certainly elements of those [pieces] in my music now but I think more recently I have been more interested in things that are a little bit more whimsical.”¹⁴

In his works composed since 2015, which Cuong identifies as his second period, he defines his style as a pursuit to create musical experiences that the audiences can understand even if the material seems a bit strange to them. He describes it as “setting [the audience] up for a joke that they are in on.”¹⁵ In *Extra Fancy* (2017), for six double reed instruments, Cuong the primary melody is transformed in its later iterations by replacing some of the notes with multiphonics in one or two of the instruments. “You can very clearly hear what these multiphonics are doing and it’s a way to make multiphonics fun and playful, so that it’s not this weird thing that the audience, or even performers, think that they cannot understand.”¹⁶ In

¹⁴ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

¹⁵ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019.

¹⁶ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August, 2019.

Bull's-Eye, this whimsical approach manifests as changing meters suddenly augment or diminish small fragments of the thematic material to thwart the audience's expectation, distorting the familiar.

Compositional Approach

As a composer in the digital age, Cuong uses a hybrid of digital and manuscript methods to construct his works. His methodology is often influenced by the medium for which he is writing and the source material for the piece. When Cuong is familiar with the medium, as he is with wind band, he often composes directly into notation software.¹⁷ In other instances, he will sit at the piano and create sketches on his iPad; this is as close as he comes to using a pencil and staff paper, prior to expanding those ideas into a full score.¹⁸

Cuong is inspired by both visual and aural cues. His inspiration might come from a piece of visual art, a news article, a melody or melodic fragment, or simply a sound or timbre that he finds interesting. In his recent works, Cuong demonstrates a preference for finding the smallest musical idea and “then blowing it way out of proportion.”¹⁹ Cuong provides an example of this approach with his works *Nothing If Not* (2015) and *Moxie* (2018):²⁰

In *Nothing If Not* and *Moxie*, I fell in love with the sound of these flute harmonics. I play a little bit of flute too, but that was me just coming up with this sound on the flute. I remember putting the sound into *Logic* and looping it and layering it. I realized that I can replicate this layering with two flutes and then embellish it with other acoustic sounds that parallel the timbre. In the case of *Moxie*, I had the whole string section perform sul ponticello, which is, in a way, like overblowing a fundamental note in the same way I had the flute doing it. The flute has this high brittle sound when it is overblowing, so I paired it with hi-hat, xylophone, and high piano. This all came from one sound.²¹

¹⁷ Cuong currently uses *Dorico* notation software.

¹⁸ An example of this approach can be seen in Cuong's sketches for the first movement of *Fine Lines* in Appendix C.

¹⁹ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

²⁰ *Moxie*, for full orchestra, is a reimagining of *Nothing If Not*, which was composed for double woodwinds, piano, bass, and percussion.

²¹ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

In his studio, Cuong has a collection of instruments, including a violin, saxophone, clarinet, and snare drum, that he uses to experiment with sounds and techniques while composing. When instruments are not available, or if an instrument is unfamiliar to him, Cuong depends on his connections with expert musicians to help guide his writing and to expand his sound palette. This process of discovery, of finding out what is musically possible from an instrument or combination of instruments, is one of Cuong's favorite parts of the compositional process.

Chapter 4: Source Material

The artwork of Pablo Picasso has always captivated Cuong, even in his youth. Cuong's parents were collectors of nineteenth and twentieth-century painters and the walls of their house were adorned with prints from various artists like Monet, Renoir, and Cézanne. Picasso was the most contemporary artist that his parents displayed in their home and his *Dove of Peace* (1949) particularly intrigued the young composer. This single line drawing of a dove has become one of the world's most recognizable symbols for peace.²² Cuong was awed by Picasso's ability to communicate so much with a single line and this work led Cuong to further explore Picasso's collection of single line drawings of people and other animals, which served as the inspiration for Cuong's *Fine Lines* (2019), a six-movement work for Pierrot ensemble that was commissioned by Music From Copland House.²³

Three of the six movements are inspired by Picasso's single line drawings of dancers (*Dancer #1*, *Dancer #2*, and *Dancer #3*) and the other three are inspired by his depictions of animals (*Grasshopper*, *Sparrow*, and *Dove*). The first movement, "Dancer #1," contains melodic material that is constructed of an ascending sixth followed by a descending seventh. The tango-esque feel of the music was inspired by Picasso's home country of Spain and Cuong emulates the spirit of the tango by employing syncopated rhythms, shifting meters and accents, *forte* pizzicatos, and aggressive descending lines that punch through the texture of the dance melody.²⁴

In 2019, Cuong was one of four emerging composers selected to participate in the inaugural DeGaetano Composition Institute. This seven-month program culminated in a week-long residency in New York City with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and a premiere of each

²² www.pablocassio.org/dove-of-peace.jsp

²³ www.coplandhouse.org

²⁴ Although the tango is associated with Argentina, Cuong's use of the dance form is an example of a Pan-Hispanic view, a social unification of Spanish speaking countries.

composer's resulting work for chamber orchestra. For this program, Cuong elected to revisit the material he conceived for the first movement of *Fine Lines*. Cuong reimagined it into a five-minute piece for chamber orchestra, *Bullish*, that was premiered on July 19, 2019.

For *Bull's-Eye*, Cuong has further expanded the material used in *Fine Lines* and *Bullish* by crafting a ten-minute work for chamber winds, piano and percussion that is influenced by Picasso's series of lithographic plates, *The Bull* (1945).²⁵ This series of eleven images of a bull provides the viewer with a look inside the mind of the artist as Picasso progressively distorts and distills the image of a bull until, in the final plate, it is in its simplest form, a line drawing.

During the winter of 1945, Picasso spent four months learning and experimenting with lithography in the workshop of Fernand Moulot in Paris, France.²⁶ Picasso, whose primary output was painting and drawing, was fascinated by the capacity to capture an artist's creative process afforded by lithography. Through the manipulation of oil, grease, and crayon on the surface of a limestone slab, Picasso was able to capture an image in various states as it progressed to its final form. This is not possible with drawing or painting where Picasso's creative process would "disappear in the course of the work"²⁷ as the image would develop on top of itself, hiding the creative process.

During his time in Moulot's workshop, Picasso created four series of lithographs, the most well-known of these productions is the eleven images of a bull. In *Bull's-Eye*, Cuong uses theme-and-variations form to musically emulate Picasso's creative process of abstraction and distillation of the bull figure. The tango-esque theme, when it is first introduced, is fully formed

²⁵ Digital images of the eleven states of Picasso's *The Bull* can be accessed on the Museum of Modern Art's website, www.moma.org.

²⁶ Irving Lavin, "Picasso's Bulls(s): Art History in Reverse," *Art in America*, vol. 81, issue 3, March 1993, p. 77.

²⁷ Pablo Picasso quoted by Deborah Wye in *A Picasso Portfolio: Prints from the Modern Museum of Art*, New York: The Modern Museum of Art, 2010, pg. 15.

and, over the course of the subsequent four variations, the theme becomes denser and more complex. During the final two variations, Cuong progressively thins the theme “until it’s left with just the essence of what it is,”²⁸ echoing the final single-line image of Picasso’s bull.

²⁸ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

Chapter 5: Form and Structure

With the creation of *Bull's-Eye*, Cuong has taken the intervallic relationship of an ascending sixth followed by a descending seventh of varying qualities, first used by the composer in *Fine Lines* (2019), and expanded that progression into a 10-minute tango-esque work in theme-and-variations form.²⁹

The score is in C and is orchestrated for 13 players:

Piccolo
Flute
Clarinet in B flat
Bass Clarinet
Soprano Saxophone
Alto Saxophone
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone

Trumpet in B flat
Horn in F

Piano

Percussion 1: marimba, bass drum
Percussion 2: glockenspiel, wood block

The tonal center of *Bull's-Eye* modulates constantly, due to its intervallic construction. However, each thematic statement and variation begins in one of the following keys: C minor, F minor, F-sharp minor, and G minor.

²⁹ Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

The work begins with a two-minute chorale that outlines the intervallic progression that is the basis for the ensuing tango. Originally crafted as closing material for the work, mirroring the final plate of Picasso's *The Bull*, Cuong repurposed the serene chorale as introductory material after he created a more succinct conclusion for the piece. The chorale features a primary theme voiced in multiple instruments. However, no two voices move at the same time dynamically or harmonically (Figure 1).

The musical score for Figure 1 shows the first three measures of 'Bull's-Eye' by Cuong. The instruments are arranged vertically: Clarinet in Bb, Bass Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, and Baritone Saxophone. The music is in 4/4 time. The primary theme is characterized by dynamic markings of *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *p* (piano). The instruments play in a staggered fashion, with no two voices moving at the same time dynamically or harmonically.

Figure 1: The first three measures of *Bull's-Eye*, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, mm. 1 to 3. Used with permission.

Following the chorale, the “Slinky”³⁰ feel of the tango is introduced by a two-measure motive (Tango Tag),³¹ punctuated by whip and slap tongues in the bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, and baritone saxophone. The Tango Tag is utilized later in the work as transition material and to

³⁰ Tempo descriptor on pg. 5 of the score.

³¹ Motivic descriptor created by the author.

conclude the piece. This motive is constructed of the opening intervals of the subsequent tango-esque theme and ends firmly on a G major triad, the dominant of the theme's C minor tonic (Figure 2).

Slinky (♩ = 72)

Piccolo

Flute

Clarinet in B♭

Base Clarinet

Soprano Saxophone

Alto Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone

Baritone Saxophone

Trumpet in B♭

Horn in F

Piano

Marimba

Whip

Wood Block

fl.

open slap

open slap

open slap

harmon mute stem in

Whip

To Glock.

29

30

31

32

Figure 2: Tango Tag, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye* mm. 29 to 31. Used with permission.

The first statement of the tango-esque theme begins in measure 32. The melody is fragmented; it does not appear in its entirety in one instrument. Cuong describes this treatment of the melody as “one big hocket”³² throughout the winds and percussion.³³ The piano, which contains most of the intervallic progression, serves as the glue between the other voices of the ensemble. The primary theme, in a reduced form, can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Reduced Primary Theme, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, mm. 32 to 37.

The theme is presented twice with the second statement, starting in measure 38, rooted in F minor, and is characterized by accented entrances, frenzied descending lines, shifting meters, and shimmering textures created by glockenspiel and flutter-tongued piccolo. The first statement of the theme concludes in measure 45 when the driving rhythmic pulse comes to a sudden stop with a sustained C6 in piccolo, flute, piano, and glockenspiel.

The transitional material in measures 46 to 55 returns the ensemble to the home key of C minor to prepare for the first variation. The transitional material is constructed of three motives, each returning later in the work to serve as connecting tissue between the variations. The first motive, dubbed the Triadic Motive,³⁴ is constructed of second inversion triads following the intervallic progression of the theme. Following a series of descending quintuplets, the motive concludes with fragmented material containing the ascending sixth and descending seventh progression leading to an accented and pulsed E-flat major triad (Figure 4):

³² Viet Cuong interview by Nils Landsberg, 1 August 2019.

³³ Cuong describes his method of orchestration of the theme as “one big hocket.” However, a more appropriate term for the compositional technique employed would be Klangfarbenmelodie.

³⁴ Motivic descriptor created by the author.

The musical score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Piccolo, Flute, Clarinet in Bb, Bass Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet in Bb, Horn in F, Piano, Maracas, and Glockenspiel. The music is in 3/4 time and features a triadic motive. Dynamics range from *p* (piano) to *ff* (fortissimo). The score is divided into measures 45, 46, 47, 48, and 49.

Key features of the score include:

- Piccolo:** Starts in measure 45 with a *p* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* (order) marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Flute:** Starts in measure 45 with a *p* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Clarinet in Bb:** Starts in measure 45 with a *p* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Bass Clarinet:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Soprano Saxophone:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Alto Saxophone:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Tenor Saxophone:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Baritone Saxophone:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Trumpet in Bb:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Horn in F:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Piano:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Maracas:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.
- Glockenspiel:** Starts in measure 45 with a *f* dynamic, then moves to measure 48 with an *ord.* marking and *ff* dynamic.

Figure 4: Triadic Motive, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, mm. 45 to 48. Used with permission.

The second motive, dubbed the Italian 6th Motive,³⁵ scored here for saxophone quartet, is a figure that approaches an Italian 6th chord, highlighted in Figure 5, and resolves to a G major chord, the dominant of C minor. This material is slightly modified every time that it appears in the work.

Figure 5: Italian 6th Motive, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, mm. 49 to 50. Used with permission.

The final transitional motive is constructed of the first two intervals of the theme presented in a repetitive fashion, reminiscent of a skipping or broken record player, thus the name Broken Record Motive (Figure 6).³⁶ The melodic content of the motive is fragmented and scored for piccolo, flute, clarinet, soprano saxophone, and alto saxophone. The piano serves as the binding element for the winds, presenting the melodic content of the motive without fragmentation. The Broken Record Motive appears in the home key of C minor each time that it is utilized in the work.

³⁵ Motivic descriptor created by the author.

³⁶ Motivic descriptor created by the author.

51

Picc. $p < mp$ $p < mp$ $p < mp$ f

Fl. p f

Cl. in Bb p f

S. Sax. p f

A. Sax. p f

Pno p f

Mar. p

Glock. f

Figure 6: Broken Record Motive, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, mm. 51 to 54. Used with permission.

The first variation begins in measure 55 with the initial three bars of the theme appearing unaltered from its first presentation. The tango-esque feel is then suddenly altered in the following measures as some elements of the theme are augmented through metric modification. The second statement of the theme in this variation is cast in G minor. This statement is also metrically altered, and the theme ends suddenly with the first appearance of a rhythmic fanfare, dubbed Fanfare Figure,³⁷ voiced in the piccolo, flute, trumpet, horn, and woodblock. The rhythmic construction of the Fanfare Figure can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Fanfare Figure, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye*, m. 73. Used with permission.

The Broken Record Motive returns in measure 74 to serve as transitional material to the second variation. However, after one statement of the four-measure motive, the material begins a second statement, with the exception of marimba and the left hand of the piano. The motive is then interrupted, after two measures, by a return of the Tango Tag that preceded the first

³⁷ Motivic descriptor created by the author.

statement of the primary theme. This material is nearly identical to its first appearance other than a shift in timbre created by the mute change (harmon to straight) in the trumpet.

The second variation, measures 83 to 99, is scored in C minor and F minor with the tempo increased to quarter note=76 from the original 72. The metric structure is altered to augment and, for the first time, diminish small fragments of the theme. The orchestration is thicker than the previous two statements, mirroring the progression of the first few plates of Picasso's *The Bull* where the bull increases in size. The frenzied descending lines are now elongated and layered in multiple voices. In addition, the first appearance of a 6/16 time signature characterizes this variation.

In measure 100, the transitional material is restated with some minor alterations. The first and second motives are nearly identical to their first appearance and the third motive is appears in its original form. The changes are minor, but should be emphasized:

Triadic Motive (mm. 100 to 103):

1. Clarinet is added to the opening triadic motion.
2. Piccolo is added to the frenzied descending line in measure 99.
3. Trumpet is scored an octave higher.
4. Horn is scored a fifth higher and has a rip added at the front of measure 99.
5. The E-flat major triad, used to close the motive, is pulsed eight times rather than the two times it was sounded in its first iteration.

Italian 6th Motive (mm. 104 to 105):

1. The ascending figure in the saxophones is diminished from a sextuplet to four sixteenth notes.

2. The return to G minor is emphasized by a new cascading figure voiced in piano and marimba that is highlighted by quintal harmony (F/C/G/D) in the saxophones, clarinet, and piccolo. The cascading figure closes on a marcato G that is punctuated by the addition of trumpet and horn to the texture and the quintal harmony resolving to G and D.

In the third variation, Cuong continues to stretch and compress fragments of the theme in order to subvert the listener's expectations. 6/16 bars appear three times during this variation, incorporating rapid renditions of the frenzied descending figures from earlier variations. Unique to this variation is the tonal center of the second statement of the theme; it is presented for the first time in F-sharp minor. However, it is abruptly interrupted after only four measures, leaving the now-familiar intervallic progression incomplete in this new key. Utilizing an extended version of the cascading figure first introduced in measure 105, Cuong seems to acknowledge the surprise of this foreign tonal center and uses this brief transitional material to reset the tonal center to G minor, before restarting the second statement of the theme in measure 129. Near the end of this statement, the theme is interrupted by a flourish of descending septuplets, set in the first 12/16 bar in the work, over a D major triad in the piano. The variation concludes with the Fanfare Figure, repeated three times, on a unison G in the piccolo, flute, and brass in measure 136.

Two motives of transitional material return in measures 137 to 150. The Broken Record Motive appears first and is stated twice. Followed by the Italian 6th Motive voiced again in the saxophones. However, this iteration is crafted as an undulating, decelerating Italian 6th resolution in C minor (Figure 8). The release of dissonance finally arrives on the second pulse of measure

150 as the Italian 6th increases dynamic energy before resolving to a G major triad in the piccolo and glockenspiel.

Figure 8: Undulating Italian 6th Motive, Cuong, *Bull's-Eye* mm. 144 to 150. Used with permission.

The fourth variation, in regard to the work's relationship with *The Bull*, is indicative of Picasso's third plate in the series. Similar to how the bull is presented in its largest and most detailed form in Picasso's image, the orchestration of this variation is at its thickest. The Klangfarbenmelodie that was utilized in all previous versions of the theme is now absent as the melodic line is fully realized in both the piano and trumpet. The theme is presented twice, in C minor and F minor, and the two statements are identical in metric form and rhythm. The variation is repeated following a brief syncopated version of the Italian 6th Motive, now scored for flute, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, trumpet, and piano. Cuong utilizes the Fanfare

Figure to conclude the transition back to C minor and to announce the repeat of the variation.

Following the second statement of the variation, the syncopated version of the Italian 6th Motive is repeated three times, each statement separated by the Fanfare Figure. At the conclusion of its third statement, the Fanfare Figure is repeated and extended, in response to a pedal G in the piano and baritone saxophone, prior to the return of the Broken Record Motive in measure 186.

On the surface, this iteration of the Broken Record Motive appears unmodified from its previous appearances. However, there are slight modifications that foreshadow the drastic change that is about to manifest in the primary theme. Cuong has removed the syncopated movement from the left hand of the piano and the marimba. This rhythmic energy has been replaced by a pedal C in the bass clarinet and the left hand of the piano. The transition to the fifth variation concludes with a bold statement of the Fanfare Motive which is followed the undulating and slowing version of the Italian 6th Motive that first appeared in measure 144.

The fifth variation of the theme, in C minor and F minor, is strikingly different than the previous four variations. After the frenzied descending sextuplets in measure 199, which would lead the listener to believe that the driving energy of the dancelike theme would continue, the listener's expectations are thwarted by Cuong's augmentation of the primary theme, now presented in half-time. The essence of the theme remains, despite the augmented setting, and the energy from previous iterations is maintained by the accented interruptions of the frenzied descending lines. Unique to this variation is how Cuong utilizes the 6/16 bars to create to very different rhythmic textures. In previous variations, the 6/16 meter was used only to accentuate and compress the descending figures. However, in this iteration, Cuong uses the 6/16 bar, in measures 209 and 217, to slightly augment the melodic content in the piano. In measures 222-

224, like Picasso's thinning of the bull, Cuong distills the orchestration of the ensemble by presenting the thematic material fragmented between five voices.

Measures 225-233 present augmented treatments of two transitional motives with the following modifications:

Triadic Motive (m. 225-230):

1. Voiced primarily in piano with a brief interruption by descending quintuplets scored in flute, clarinet, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and trumpet.
2. The second half of the motive is voiced in a fragmented style leading to a sustained, rather than pulsed, E-flat major triad in the winds that is supported by the left hand of the piano.

Italian 6th Motive (m. 231-233):

1. Rhythmically augmented into eighth note triplets.

The final and sixth variation of the work presents three treatments of the primary theme in C minor, F-sharp minor, and G minor. The distillation of the texture continues. The frenzied descending lines, which were present in every bar of the first statement of the theme, are far scarcer, occurring only five times in this final iteration. Unlike the previous variations, Cuong utilizes transitional motives to bridge each of these three statements, creating the illusion that these are in fact three separate variations rather than a single variation. A modified Triadic Motive is used in measure 247, with a sudden move out of the established half-time feel, as connecting tissue to the start of the second statement in measure 249. In measures 253-255, Cuong presents the Italian 6th Motive augmented as quarter-note triplet figures, scored for the first time in voices outside the saxophone quartet.

Like Picasso's final print of the series, which embodied the essence of the bull figure with a single line, Cuong has retained the essence of the primary theme in its final statement in measures 256-268. Cuong scores the material in its thinnest form, without piano or marimba, in fragmentation. Prior to its conclusion, the theme is interrupted by quiet descending quintuplets, stretched and layered in 4/4, echoing the energetic fragments that have colored the thematic material throughout the piece.

To conclude the work, Cuong uses the Broken Record Motive as a coda. The motive is stated three times in augmentation with its final statement scored only for five voices. In measure 280, a modified version of the Tango Tag abruptly thrusts the piece to a close in the home key of c minor.

The overall structure and form of *Bull's-Eye* is outlined below in Figure 9.

Bull's-Eye, Viet Cuong
Form and Structure

Measures	Material	Tonal Markers
1-28	Chorale	Cmin, Gmin, Fmin
29-31	Tango Tag	Cmin
32-44	Theme	Cmin, Fmin
45-51	Transitional Material Triadic Motive Italian 6 th Motive Broken Record Motive	Fmin, Cmin
55-73	Variation 1	Cmin, Gmin
74-82	Transitional Material Broken Record Motive Tango Tag	Cmin
83-98	Variation 2	Cmin, Fmin
99-109	Transitional Material Triadic Motive Italian 6 th Motive Cascading Figure in Piano Broken Record Motive	Cmin
110-136	Variation 3 Cascading Figure in Piano extended	Cmin, F#min, Gmin
137-150	Transitional Material Broken Record Motive Italian 6 th Motive - Undulating	Cmin
151-168	Variation 4 Thickest Orchestration Syncopated Italian 6 th Motive Bridges the Repeated Section	Cmin, Fmin
169-199	Transitional Material Syncopated It6 Motive - Three Times Broken Record Motive Italian 6 th Motive – Undulating	Cmin
200-232	Variation 5 Half-time Feel	Cmin, Fmin
231-233	Transitional Material Italian 6 th Motive – Triplet Figures	Cmin
234-268	Variation 6	Cmin, F#min, Gmin
269-281	Coda Broken Record Motive Modified Tango Tag	Cmin

Figure 9

Chapter 6: Rehearsal Considerations

When preparing a new piece of music for its premiere, conductors must consider potential issues that could challenge the ensemble members. In the case of *Bull's-Eye*, four areas of consideration for the rehearsal process: deciphering the Klangfarbenmelodie, independent dynamic contour, shifting meters, and staging.

Deciphering the Klangfarbenmelodie

The tango-esque theme, from its initial statement, is fragmented throughout the ensemble. For the ensemble to understand how their voice fits or interacts with the thematic material, it is recommended that the first read of the piece start with the fourth variation in measures 151-165. This presentation of the thematic material is the only instance in which it is not fragmented. By starting with this section, the theme is easily identifiable and the dance-like feel of the piece is emphasized by the syncopated rhythm scored in the bass clarinet, baritone saxophone, the left hand of the piano, and bass drum.

Once the ensemble has a grasp of the theme and its rhythmic energy, it becomes easier for the players to decipher the role of their voice in the other statements of the theme. If players continue to struggle with connecting their fragmented parts, encourage the ensemble to listen to the MIDI recording of the piece for further guidance.³⁸

Independent dynamic contour

Throughout the work, Cuong layers large amounts of independent dynamic shaping in each voice. The ensemble cannot rely on the conductor to provide complete gestural guidance for dynamic contour. As a result, the players must be empowered to exaggerate the dynamic indications provided by the composer. This is especially vital during the introductory chorale,

³⁸ The MIDI recording is available by contacting the composer through his website, www.vietcuongmusic.com/contact

where Cuong's layering of dynamic shape creates unique timbral colors that inject energy and direction into the fluid writing.³⁹ During the theme and variation portion of the piece, it is the dynamic indications, in combination with energetic articulations, that bring the dance to life.

Cuong provides the players with a high level of aesthetic detail in their parts and they must be intentional with their performance of these indications. This is especially true in moments that involve quick bursts of dynamic growth and energy. A prime example of this can be found in measures 119-120 (Figure 10). Cuong has created timbral shifts in energy between the clarinet, soprano saxophone, and alto saxophone. If the players are not deliberate and aggressive in their shaping, these unique timbral shifts will not be realized.

³⁹ During a rehearsal with the University of Kansas Wind Ensemble on October 21, 2019, the composer provided additional timbral instruction to the soprano saxophone in mm. 14-28. In mm. 14-20 the soprano saxophone is echoed by the trumpet., Cuong requested that the color of the saxophone be bright and edgy—like a trumpet. In mm. 21-28, where the saxophone is echoed by the flute, Cuong requested that the color be more transparent or hazy —like a flute.

119

Fl. *pp*

Cl. in B \flat *ff* *ff*

S. Sax. *ff* *ff* *ff*

A. Sax. *ff* *ff* *f*

Pno *sfz* *Red.*

Mar.

Glock. *f*

Figure 10: *Bull's-Eye* m. 119-120. Used with permission.

Shifting Meters

Bull's-Eye, in its 281 measures, contains 131 meter changes. This is a conducting tour de force! In order to better serve the players, it is recommended that, during the 3/8 and 5/8 bars, the conductor conduct the eighth note. This better serves the ensemble as it firmly establishes the sixteenth note subdivision, making syncopated entrances less troublesome and easing the transitions to the 6/16 and 12/16 bars when the conductor pulses the triple sixteenth note groupings. In addition, according to musicians who have read the work, conducting the eighth note provides the ensemble with a clearer visual road map of the piece.

Staging

Bull's-Eye's unique instrumentation and use of Klangfarbenmelodie creates some unique challenges regarding staging of the ensemble. However, through some experimentation during a reading session of the piece on August 25, 2019 at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, the staging depicted in the graphic below (Figure 12) was found to have the most success for the piece.

Bull's-Eye

Viet Cuong

Recommended Ensemble Staging

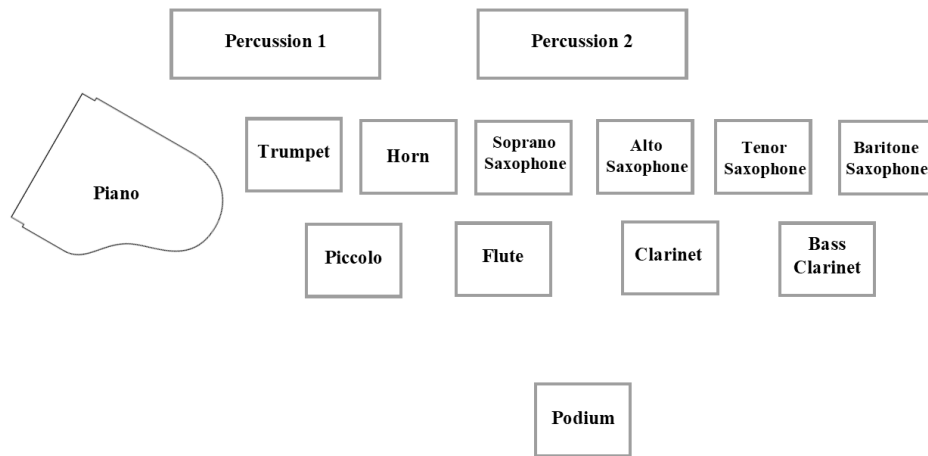


Figure 12

Final Thoughts

With the composition of this challenging work for chamber winds, Cuong has created a unique musical soundscape that sits at the intersection of the visual and performing arts. This crossroads of the arts generates opportunities for collaboration between conductors, musicians, and visual artists and the creation of unique performance opportunities that synthesize the two art forms. *Bull's-Eye* was completed on August 10, 2019 and premiered by the University of Kansas Wind Ensemble on October 23, 2019 at the Lied Center in Lawrence, Kansas.

Appendix A

Viet Cuong Works for Wind Ensemble

Sound And Smoke (2011)

Grade 6, 14:00

Walter Beeler Memorial Prize from Ithaca College (2012)

Moth (2013)

Grade 6, 8:00

Commissioned by the Brooklyn Wind Symphony, Jeff Ball, conductor

Nothing If Not (2015); for chamber winds

Grade 6, 14:00

Written for the American Modern Ensemble

Diamond Tide (2015)

Grade 4, 8:00

Commissioned by the Texas Music Educators Association Region 18 Middle School Bands

Howls and Hymns (2017); for professional trombone and young band

Grade 3, 8:00

Commissioned by Tim Smith, trombone, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

There (2017); for chamber choir and chamber winds

Grade 4

Commissioned by the University of Tennessee at Martin

Lasting Light (2018)

Grade 4, 8:30

Commissioned by The Consortium for the Advancement of Wind Band Literature, led by James Kull

Re(new)al (2019); concerto for percussion quartet and wind ensemble

Grade 6, 16:00

Adaptation for wind ensemble

Tuba Concerto (2019); concerto for tuba and wind ensemble

16:00

Commissioned by Dr. Daniel Tembras and Purdue University Fort Wayne and a consortium of wind ensembles

Bull's-Eye (2019); for chamber winds

Grade 6, 10:00

Commissioned by a consortium of ten universities and organizations led by Nils Landsberg

Appendix B

Viet Cuong Interview – August 1, 2019

Landsberg: Can you share with me a little bit more about how you came to be a composer? Does your family have a musical background or are you the first one to really find music as a passion?

Cuong: No one in my family is a musician. I think that my mother wanted me to start on piano when I was young because she read about the “Mozart effect.” She put me in piano lessons when I was four or five. But it was the Suzuki Method – I enjoyed playing the piano, but I didn’t get to play the music that I wanted to play, I was restricted to their curriculum. So, after a little bit of that, I ended up quitting. When we moved to Georgia I had interest in playing piano still. So, my mom enrolled me in lessons with a new teacher at the local music store who was much more flexible with the repertoire. I actually got to play what I wanted to play. I remember that when I was eight, I was learning the Pachelbel *Canon*. I remember just playing the left hand and making up my own melodies over the chords. As a result, I started to learn how chords worked. It also taught me about consonance and dissonance. But even though I liked playing music more, I still didn’t love to practice. I liked to make things up. I started to make up these piano improvisations and I eventually started to write them down. I remember in eighth grade, or maybe it was in the seventh grade, I went to a weekend band camp that the high school was presenting to introduce the middle school students to the high school band. One of the band directors gave short presentation on *Finale Notepad*. I remember thinking “Oh, this is what I’ve always needed!” I had these ideas that I wanted to write down, but I didn’t have any staff paper. I went home and learned how to use *Finale Notepad* by attempting to write music in the style of what we were playing in band. I was a percussionist in band – my piano background dictated that I was a percussionist. I remember counting a lot of rests and learning how the band worked, in regard to orchestration. During rehearsal the director would isolate voices: “Can I hear the flutes and clarinets together?” “Can I hear the saxes and horns?” and I became aware of common voices in the medium simply by being in band class. After school I would go home and try to write a piece like Robert W. Smith or Robert Sheldon, composers whose music we were playing in the band. I received the full version of *Finale* when the Assistant Director at my high school won a copy of it in a raffle at the Midwest Clinic. She gave me one of her login/download codes. I was finally able to have create and work with a full score, with all the instruments of the band. *Finale Notepad* has a limit of ten staves. As a result of this limit, I was primarily writing chamber music, but, after receiving the full version of *Finale*, I wrote more pieces and I had enough compositions to use in my applications for college. I didn’t have any real recordings until I got into college, only MIDI renderings. In fact, I didn’t have a composition teacher until college. My band directors in high school would let me borrow scores and I remember borrowing all of the *Teaching Music through Performance in Band* CDs. This is how I learned about band repertoire. I am very much a “band kid.” When I went to college, my ears opened up a lot because Peabody has a wind ensemble, but it isn’t a band school. It’s not like I went to Michigan or the University of Texas – who are well-known for their bands.

Landsberg: On your website it also says that you play clarinet. Can you expand on that?

Cuong: Yeah, funny story! Basically, since I play a lot of mallet instruments I was always put in the front ensemble for marching band. In high school, we went to the Tournament of Roses Parade and the Macy's [Thanksgiving Day] Parade. Members of the front ensembles would play sleigh bells in these parades and I didn't want to do that. So, my mom bought me a plastic clarinet on eBay so that I could play clarinet in the parades. I actually ended up switching to clarinet full-time near the end of high school. I love percussion, but learning the clarinet changed my perspective as a young composer. There are all these aspects of music that I think a young percussionist wouldn't think or care about because – what would staccato mean for a snare drummer? I remember when I was writing for my friends in middle school on *Finale Notepad*, I brought something in that I wrote for my friend Kara, who played trumpet. After reading the piece she asked "Do you want everything to be tongued?" I didn't know what she meant by that statement. So, learning clarinet was really helpful to becoming a better composer. It was also nice to have a background in percussion. As a composer, that is a lot to learn, how the whole percussion section works.

Landsberg: How would you describe your musical voice or your style? Do you feel that you have found your voice as a young composer?

Cuong: I recently have found what I really like to do and what works well for me. It's interesting to talk about this with someone like you who knows more than just my wind ensemble music. I think that my wind ensemble music, I still stand by all of it – at least the pieces that are available. I don't stand by everything that I have written. Pieces that are available on my website, I stand by those. Especially *Sound And Smoke*. I wrote that when I was twenty. The first movement, especially, was a big breakthrough for me. That piece, *Moth*, and *Diamond Tide* I think of as my musical voice from my time in my early twenties. There are certainly elements of those [pieces] in my music now but more recently I have been more interested in things that are a little bit more whimsical. I guess you can call it that. I realized that what I like to do is take things that are older or more familiar and distort it a little bit.

Landsberg: Was that your thinking with this piece? In an earlier conversation we had you mentioned that you were wanting to possibly pair it with an older chamber work from the core repertoire – is that how you approached this work?

Cuong: That was more instrumentation driven, which has obviously been abandoned. I think that it is fun to find ways to put a new spin on older things. Whether it be functional harmony or rhythms that evoke a certain type of music and then create something similar but a bit distorted. I like to call it "whimsical" or "whimsy" – a playful spirit. I don't know if you are aware of this piece that I wrote for the group *Alarm Will Sound*, a new music sinfonietta group. It's a tango-esque work, your piece lives in a similar world. But this piece, for *Alarm Will Sound*, is like a tango that kind of goes off the rails. It starts off with a melody and then that melody is stated a second time, but the repeat is kind of this weird version of itself. Multiphonics are added in, quartertones, detuned pitches, and glissandi happen and it becomes this wild thing. I think that this is fun. I think that with a lot of my music now, I try to write it so that the audience will be able to understand things that are happening even if they are a bit weird. It is almost like setting

them up for a joke, but they are in on it. I have a piece for double reed sextet called *Extra Fancy*, which is a piece for six double reed instruments. The work starts with sudden motion and then I add in multiphonics, replacing the original notes. You can very clearly hear what these multiphonics are doing and it's a way to make multiphonics fun and playful so that it is not this weird thing that the audience, or even performers, think that they cannot understand. But also, the performers, they clearly see what is happening and that helps them to get into the groove and to understand what my intentions.

Landsberg: How do you find your inspiration when you are approaching a new piece? Do you have a specific method when starting a composition?

Cuong: They come from a lot of things, but sometimes it is visual art or sometimes it is simply a sound that I really love. I think you know my piece *Nothing If Not*, or my orchestra piece, I took *Nothing if Not* and turned it into a big orchestra piece.

Landsberg: That's *Moxie*?

Cuong: Yeah. That is something that we can talk about too, how I adapt material from different pieces. In *Nothing If Not* and *Moxie*, I fell in love with the sound of these flute harmonics. I play a little bit of flute too, but that was me just coming up with this sound on the flute. I remember putting the sound into *Logic* and looping it and layering it. I realized that I can replicate this layering with two flutes and then embellish it with other acoustic sounds that parallel the timbre. In the case of *Moxie*, I had the whole string section perform *sul ponticello*, which is, in a way, like overblowing a fundamental note in the same way I had the flute doing it. The flute has this high brittle sound when it is overblowing, so I paired it with hi-hat, xylophone, and high piano. This all came from one sound. With some other pieces it might be a melody or a melodic fragment that I use to craft an entire piece – lately I am interested in making the most of the smallest thing. In the case of *Nothing If Not* it was basically one note – what can you do with just a B and a C? With this tango I wrote last summer it was this melody with multiphonics which just repeats over and over again. With your piece it is this ascending 6th, descending 7th thing and it keeps modulating and modulating. I think recently it just basically finding a little musical nugget and then blowing it way out of proportion.

Landsberg: You mentioned that you experiment with *Logic* and that you still use *Finale*.

Cuong: Actually, I use *Dorico* now.

Landsberg: Do you do any writing by hand or do you strictly compose in notation software?

Cuong: I do kind of a mix. When I do things by hand it's on my iPad – basically virtual staff paper. I do a lot of that, especially when a piece is new and I'm starting at the piano. It depends on the piece, some pieces I just write directly in the notation software and other times I like to sketch things out at the piano first. With the sketches, I can have all of the chords mapped out so that it is less intimidating when I move to a score with 30-plus staves.

Landsberg: You mentioned with *Nothing If Not* that you dabbled on the flute to discover the unique sound that became the basis of the work. Do you ever collaborate with live musicians during your composition process?

Cuong: Yes, a lot. It depends on the piece. With some pieces, if I don't know the instrument as well, I will do that. For instance, I wrote this snare drum solo recently. I haven't played percussion in quite some time, so I went to the snare drum and I tried everything out. I have a collection of instruments that I use when I'm experimenting. I have a violin and a saxophone. And other times I reach out to friends of mine. With *Extra Fancy*, I had an oboist send me a recording of oboe multiphonics and we had a dialogue about fingerings and what worked going between different multiphonics on the instrument. But usually, with a band piece, especially if it doesn't have anything out of the ordinary, I feel comfortable just writing it and seeing what it sounds like after the first performance. With my percussion quartet concerto, *Re(new)al*, I remember going to the percussionists' studio and we tried out a bunch of sounds. Some things worked well, and some did not. Others worked well but I didn't use them in the work. I think that is one of the most fun parts of composition: when you are doing discovery and finding out what is musically possible.

Landsberg: How did you come about using the air dusters in *Re(new)al*?

Cuong: I can't remember exactly when we had the idea, but the second movement is about wind and I wanted to use some sort of air component. One of my teachers suggested using "those cans of air." I think that Steve Mackey had used them in an earlier work, so I knew it was feasible.

Landsberg: *Re(new)al* started as a piece for percussion quartet and chamber orchestra, then it expanded into an orchestral work, and most recently for wind band. How did you handle the aspect of volume when transcribing it for these larger ensembles?

Cuong: With that piece, the chamber orchestra is problematic because the strings, there is only one of each instrument. A violin cannot compete with the volume of a clarinet. It can, but when you have four kick drums in front of the ensemble, it was definitely something that I had to keep in mind – always scoring the strings together. All of the instruments in the ensemble were amplified. We did not amplify any of the percussion other than the crystal glasses, that helped a lot. When I made the orchestra version, I still had the knowledge that the percussion was loud and could cut through the entire orchestra. So, I took the bass line and I orchestrated it for all of the trombones and when I created the wind band version, that orchestration was used again. I feel that orchestrating the band version, after the orchestra version, was a simple process. Going from the chamber orchestra to the full orchestra was the most complicated. But even with the move from orchestra to band, not having the strings was a big change. A lot of the sounds in that piece were string heavy. But I think the band version might be my favorite version. I don't know, I go back and forth. I think that I have a favorite setting for each movement. I am really proud of the band version. In fact, after I made the band version, I went back and revised the first movement of the orchestra version to include things that I came up with while orchestrating for band.

Landsberg: Your first work for band, which obviously has worth, it was awarded the Walter Beeler Award, is *Sound and Smoke*. Can you describe how that piece came to be?

Cuong: I wrote a piece during my freshman year at Peabody that the Peabody Wind Ensemble premiered. It was a success, but I have since withdrawn that piece from my catalog. At the end of my junior year the conductor asked if I wanted to write something else for the ensemble and I told him “sure, just give me 15 minutes and I will write you something.” I wrote it that summer because I wanted to write another band piece and I really wanted another large ensemble piece for my graduate school application portfolio. The piece was premiered in November, right before graduate school applications were due. It went really well and I was really proud of it. The rest is history! I feel that that piece really changed a lot of things in my life. For one, it helped me to get into my dream grad school and I feel that a lot of people know me because of that work. It has been played much more than I ever thought it would be played. Every time I hear it, or work with a band on it, I get feelings of nostalgia.

Landsberg: I imagine that it was that piece that led to the commission for *Moth*? Was that your first commission for band?

Cuong: Yeah. *Moth* is directly connected to *Sound and Smoke* because Jeff Ball, the director of the Brooklyn Wind Symphony, went to Ithaca College. He always kept a close eye on what Steve Peterson was programming and the Beeler Award is only awarded once a year so it is easy for Jeff to keep track who was winning that award. I think that he tuned into the livestream of Ithaca performing *Sound and Smoke* that spring, this was around the same time that his group got accepted to perform at Midwest. He emailed me and asked if I wanted to write a piece for their Midwest program. I remember thinking at the time that it felt very high pressure. I was very young and, I still feel this, you have something to prove when you’re twenty-two. He asked me to write a concert closer. Well, a concert closer for a Midwest program and this being their first time performing at Midwest, I felt like that it was an important piece for them and I wanted to deliver.

Landsberg: With it being a Midwest commission, I imagine that the turnaround was pretty quick.

Cuong: I don’t remember it being that stressful. I wrote most of it during the summer before that fall and I think it gave it to them at the end of September. It ended up being fine and they sounded great at the premiere.

Landsberg: So, the majority of your career as a composer you have been in school full-time?

Cuong: Yeah, pretty much all of it!

Landsberg: How did you find that balance between maintaining your commission schedule and also being true to your academic work?

Cuong: It was tough sometimes. I was lucky that I attended schools that value their students' professional careers. Institutions that didn't have the mindset that when you are in school, you are in school and it isn't until you are out of school that your career starts. It doesn't work that way. I always tell young composers that it is very important to try to do a cross-feed between your professional life and your school life. But there were times when I had to miss the premiere of a new piece because I had something at school that I could not miss. It is tough, but I worked through it and had fun while doing it. At the end of the day, you are in school to write music. I would use the pieces that I was writing for commissions to fill requirements for my coursework and I would bring those pieces into my composition lessons. Many of my teachers were fascinated. I remember bringing *Diamond Tide* into one of my composition lessons and my teachers are so used to seeing things far removed from a middle school band piece, they were very intrigued by it. In fact, one of my teachers helped with the little melody in the second movement of *Diamond Tide* [sings melody]. I don't think that finding balance was ever really an issue except that scheduling was sometimes difficult.

Landsberg: *Diamond Tide* just got added to the Prescribed Music List here in Texas.

Cuong: Yeah, I saw! That is very cool! I guess there might be more performances coming.

Landsberg: I know that you wrote that for a middle school group, but that is a tough piece for an average middle school band. I remember thinking, when I first viewed the score, "wow, there is a lot of independent motion in this" - not what you typically see in a middle school band score.

Cuong: Yeah, and I think now I don't know if I would write a piece for middle school in the same way. It's like you aim for middle school but you end up writing a high school piece; or, if you aim for sixth grade you end up with an eighth grade piece. Recently, all of the composers in the Blue Dot [Collective] just wrote a 1.5 grade piece. It was a group commission, each of us wrote a short piece that is in compound meter. I wrote a piece in 3/8, a couple others wrote in 6/8, one is in 9/8, and the other is in 12/8. Using beginning band ranges, but with compound meter. We will see how it turns out. In my piece all of the instruments are using a range between E-flat and G.

Landsberg: A lot of composers seem to shy away from writing for young band because of the limitations imposed on them based on the ability of the students. Do you find that as a challenge or as a limitation?

Cuong: I see it as a fun challenge to try to overcome. Every piece, no matter what you write, has a limitation. If you are writing a piece for the LA Phil, you still have a limitation on the amount of percussion you can use because they have a budget on percussion rentals, and they have a limit on rehearsal time too. You have to write every piece with certain limitations in mind and with middle school it is just a different set of limitations that I think most composers are familiar. I even think of some moments in Beethoven's symphonies where the piccolo's melodic voice suddenly drops an octave due to the instrument's limited range at the time. This wouldn't have to happen if the piece was written today. If Beethoven could get around things like that, then I think that all of us should try to as well. I will say that writing this really easy piece was difficult.

When you have a lot of ideas and you can't use any due to the parameters of the grade level. I am actually happy with what I did for the commission, but I have not heard it yet. I came from the band world and that is where I found my place in school, I feel this obligation to give the younger bands the best work that I can write. Or try to give them something different than everything else that is already out there. I am really proud of *Diamond Tide*. Out of those three pieces from my early days, I think that one might be my favorite, especially the first movement. I don't know much other middle or high school wind pieces that sound quite like that.

Landsberg: There are a lot of unique timbres in that piece.

Cuong: And I am proud of that. I would have no qualms if someone asked me to do an orchestra version of that work, I would do it. I think that it would still maintain its character, even if it was written for an orchestra.

Landsberg: Speaking of different mediums, your catalog on your website, the majority of it seems to be chamber music for small chamber groups. Is there a reason behind that? Or is that the medium that you prefer to write for? Or is that happen to be where the commissions came?

Cuong: Basically, it is just where a lot of the commissions and opportunities have come. When I was at Princeton, for five years, they would bring in professional groups for composers to work with and compose new pieces. That's how I got to work with Prism Sax Quartet, SO Percussion, and all these other groups. It was so good for me to do write for these ensembles. The ideas that you come up with when you write chamber music are obviously very different than what you come up with when you write orchestral or band music. The ideas that I discovered in those pieces have really helped push my band and orchestra music to a different level. It is also a lot easier to collaborate with a chamber group because you don't have to get an entire orchestra together to read through sketches or a new work. It's a lot more practical for trying new things and pushing yourself. I would say that don't like it any better or worse than writing large ensemble music, but that is where most of my opportunities were in graduate school. More recently, I have gotten a lot more orchestral and band interest in my music. But that might change in the next ten years.

Landsberg: I am sure that the recent run of *Re(new)al* with the Dallas Winds and the University of Texas has probably brought a lot more attention to your music as well.

Cuong: Yeah, at Midwest this year I was looking at my Facebook and I had three-thousand friends. Now I have four-thousand friends. Ever since *Re(new)al* happened I am amazed by how many people know who I am. I am really happy with how that turned out.

Landsberg: It makes me wonder how composers, before the internet existed, how they made their big break. It seems that social media, YouTube, and the immediate accessibility to media files make it a little easier for people to get noticed.

Cuong: I think that you just had to rely on your publisher to get your music out there for you. Now it is definitely easier to do that and I'm sure that for you, as a conductor, there is a lot more for you to wade through when you are picking repertoire. There is probably so much floating around now.

Landsberg: For this new piece, which I imagine we will see next week, how did you arrive at using Picasso's *The Bull* as the inspiration for the work?

Cuong: I have been a big Picasso fan my whole life because, growing up, my parents were very fond of 19th and 20th century painters. They had these prints all around the house, nothing original, but we had Monet and Renoir and Cézanne. But I always really liked Picasso. He was the most contemporary of the artists that my parents collected. We had some of his paintings from the different time periods of his life, but I always really liked the *Dove of Peace*. Do you know that one? It's basically a drawing of a dove with a single line. I always liked how he was able to say so much with just a single line. I later found out that he made a whole series of line drawings of different animals and of humans as well. I feel like, as a composer, I was drawn to these drawings because, like I said before, I like to make the most out of the smallest little nugget of music. Picasso could portray each of these little animals with so much personality. And it's so simple. It's almost nothing. And they all seem like they are moving. I wrote a piece for Pierrot ensemble (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano) called *Fine Lines*. Each movement is inspired by one of Picasso's line drawings. Three movements are inspired by dancers and the other three are little animals. The first movement is a minute long and it has a melody constructed of the ascending sixth, descending seventh progression that I mentioned earlier. I later turned it into a five-minute chamber orchestra piece. And now, I am taking that and expanding it for your piece, a ten-minute long chamber wind piece. The chamber orchestra piece is called *Bullish*. Which is a great title, and I wish I would have kept it for this piece, but I'm trying to find a title that works just as well. *The Bull* is a lithograph series by Picasso and it ends with a line drawing of the bull. This series is different from all of his other line drawings because it shows Picasso's process of turning a fully-formed bull, it becomes more opaque, and over the last seven or eight prints it gets distilled into its final form. The music tries to emulate this process. It starts off as a fully formed tango-esque theme and it gets more dense and more complicated. From there it gets more and more thinned out until it's left with just the essence of the theme. I think that it is going to be a fun thing for you to learn, and for the players. I hope the audience can hear what is happening, especially the distillation of the theme. I don't only peel away layers, I also make things slow-motion, or half-time for a couple of beats to really show that it is thinner [sings example]. It really shows how thin it is getting because the feel of the pulse is now in half-time.

Landsberg: You mentioned in an earlier conversation that you see this piece as part of a trilogy or a triptych. What do you envision this becoming?

Cuong: I don't imagine that anyone would do all three pieces together. In my head, it is more of a trilogy. When you go to an art gallery, there is often an entire exhibit of one artist. Often times, there are many paintings and they are all slightly different. Degas would paint ballerinas so many different ways and I think that contemporary artists are interested in doing this sort of thing. I went to an art gallery in New York and there was this artist that had these sheets of felt that had

holes cut out of them and he left all of the cut outs on the floor below. You could see the process of how the art was made. There were many different iterations of this approach displayed with different materials. This parallels the act of transcribing a composition for a completely different instrumentation - it feels like a new piece even though it is not. The piece that I wrote last summer for *Alarm Will Sound*, called *Electric Aroma*, originated as a chamber piece for clarinet, saxophone, piano, and percussion. In addition to the version for *Alarm Will Sound*, I also orchestrated the piece for saxophone ensemble. And all three of these pieces have the same title, because they are all the same material. However, they feel like completely different pieces to me. In the case of this commission, it is not quite like that because it started as a one-minute movement, expanded to seven-minutes, and now to ten-minutes. There is obviously more material that has been added since its original presentation, but the main melody is the same between the three. If people want to, they can program all three on the same concert and it would be a unique exercise showing the process of expansion. In the same way that this piece is about the process of redacting, a performance of all three works would be the inverse of that.

Landsberg: What did you end up using as the final instrumentation for the piece?

Cuong: It is for thirteen players. I hope that isn't too big. If it is too big, I can adjust a couple of things.

Landsberg: I think that we originally discussed the piece being for thirteen players.

Cuong: Ok. It's piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, sax quartet, trumpet, horn, and two percussionists.

Landsberg: You added brass!

Cuong: Yeah, I really love the sound of a trumpet with a harmon mute, so they have the harmon mute through most of the work. Which I think also helps with the balance so that it doesn't sound like a trumpet concerto. But the piece is like Picasso's line drawings – the line continues but it's like connect-the-dots almost, like a hocket. Fragments of the theme are played and then another instrument connects it to another instrument. Everything is like this big hocket the whole time and everything connects together like a web.

Landsberg: I'm really excited to see it.

Cuong: Yeah, I'm excited to finish it! I think that it is going to be fun and I am quite proud of it.

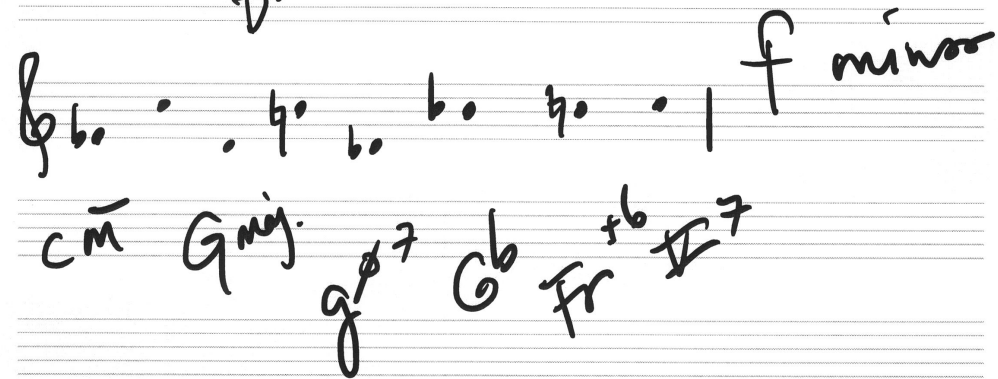
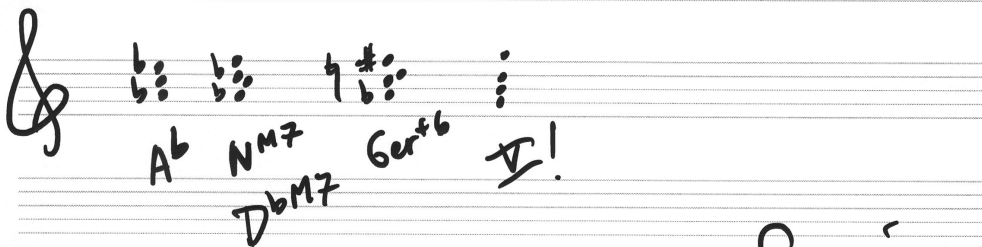
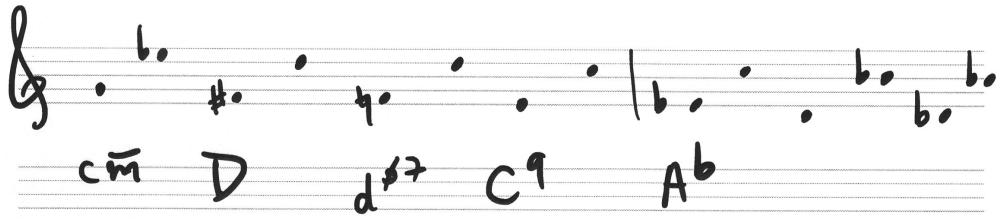
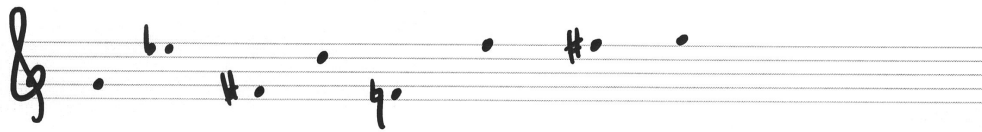
Appendix C

Viet Cuong's Sketches for *Fine Lines*, Mvt. 1, Dancer #1

Handwritten musical sketches for *Fine Lines*, Mvt. 1, Dancer #1.

The sketches are organized into three main sections:

- Predominants:** This section shows a series of chords in the upper staff, with corresponding Roman numeral and figured bass notation in the lower staff. The chords are: iv^7 , ii^7 , $\text{ii}^{\#7}$, iv , N^7 , N , $\text{V}^{\#7}$, $\text{Ger}^{\#6}$, $\text{Vii}^{\#7}$, and $\text{Fr}^{\#6}$. A bracket groups the last three chords.
- Melody:** This section shows a melodic line in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. The upper staff contains a sequence of notes: $\text{Ger}^{\#6}$, N^6 , iv^6 , and V . The lower staff contains a sequence of notes: V^7/N^6 .
- Missing Notes:** A list of missing notes: $\text{E}^{\#}$, F , $\text{A}^{\#}$, and B^{\flat} .



F minor F → C

f G g[#]7 F

f(Δ) C D[#]Δ7 D^b

c[#]m A^b g[#]Δ7 a^m

fΔ7 E^b d[#]Δ7 F^{m+6} G

Appendix D

Letter of Agreement

between:

Viet Cuong, composer
733 Grand Central Drive
Hamilton, NJ 08619
678-630-8755

and:

University of Kansas
Mu Lambda Chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi – University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
University of New Mexico
New Mexico State University
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
University of West Georgia
Fresno Pacific University
University of Manitoba
Valdosta State University
Carroll University

as full partners of a consortium to commission an original work for chamber winds.

Cuong Chamber Winds Consortium will, from this point be referred to as "patron." Viet Cuong will be referred to as "composer."

1. The commissioned work will likely be between ten (10) and fifteen (15) minutes in length and a difficulty level of Grade 5-6.
2. The commissioned work will be scored for chamber winds including piano and percussion.

The following dedication will be imprinted on the title page and engraved upon the first page of the score:

Commissioned by a consortium of ____ universities and organizations:

3. The fee for each patron's contribution to the consortium shall be five hundred dollars (\$500.00 U.S.) to be paid in 2019. Payments should be made to Reach Out Kansas, Inc. under the name "Viet Cuong Chamber Winds Commission." Reach Out Kansas, Inc. will hold all funds for the consortium until each member has paid in full.

4. Upon completion of the work, composer will e-mail the edited full score and parts by pdf to each patron. Each patron has the right to reproduce as many copies of the full score and each individual part as they please, and they may retain scores and parts after their initial performance, but patrons must promise not to give or loan scores, parts or pdf's of said work to non-consortium bands or individuals, publishers or any other such entity.
5. If patron desires composer to be present for their band's performance or to conduct their group's performance, expenses for travel, housing and expenses shall be negotiated separately from this Letter of Agreement.
6. Premiere performance of composer's work shall be given by the University of Kansas Wind Ensemble. All other performances of the work must be subsequent to the premiere in Lawrence, Kansas, which will be announced well in advance.
7. Patron members of the consortium have exclusive rights for performance of the work within one (1) year after the premiere performance.
8. Full payment of agreed-upon commission fees under Paragraph 6, \$500 U.S. dollars, shall be made prior to the delivery of the completed work to the consortium.
9. Composer agrees to deliver the completed work on or near 7 August 2019.
10. All other rights to this work in progress, including publication, subsequent performances after one year, recordings, royalties, copyright ownership, mechanical rights and ASCAP royalties remain solely with the composer. In case of publication, composer will do all within his power to see that the proper dedication and listing of all patrons involved in this consortium will appear on the back side of the title page of the full score, with an abbreviated dedication appearing at the top of each part.
11. Composer may, with permission of the consortium, postpone the agreed-upon delivery date due to physical accident, injury, serious illness or family tragedy.

We, the above parties agree to all the aforementioned provisions of this Letter of Agreement, and we assign our name(s) in good faith and with honest intent, in order to assure the protection of all parties involved:

For the Consortium:

Date: _____
Institution: _____
E-mail: _____
Telephone: _____

Composer:

Date: _____

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